How to Search the Internet

**PLAN**: Before you start searching, think carefully about what you're looking for. You may want to consult Wikipedia, an encyclopedia or another reference book to get ideas, especially if you know nothing about the topic. List the names, subtopics, special terminology, synonyms, or subjects that have something to do with what you are researching.

**KEYWORDS**: From your list of words, choose some of them and begin using them as search terms with a search engine. When entering more than one search word, you must tell the search engine about their relationship. It is important to enter in ***specific keywords,*** not just the general category.

Search engines require keywords that go together to be enclosed in ***quotation marks***. Quotation marks on either side of a phrase tell the search engine to search for those words when they are directly next to each other and in that same order. This is important when you want to limit the results to a particular name or thing that is written with more than one word. You may have to perform several searches, however, if the terms could be in a different order or could be written differently, such as abbreviated.

For example, when you enter **"polar bears"** with quotation marks, you will limit the search to the specific kind of bears you're interested in, not just any kind of bear. That will help focus your search and cut down on the results.

**BOOLEAN SEARCHING**:

All search engines use a particular method of interpreting your query called **Boolean searching**. Unfortunately, different search engines recognize different search commands. (If you want a guide to how different search engines work, go to InFoPeople at <http://www.infopeople.org/search/chart.html>.)

**Operators** are special words or symbols that link the search terms and tell the search engine what to do with them. Do you want both words in the same document, either word in any document, or to ignore anything with a particular word in it? Do you want two or more words to appear exactly as you type them, in that exact order and right next to each other? You have to speak the search engine’s language.

Some search engines use a plus or minus sign to indicate how to search. A ***plus sign*** before a search word, without a space between them, commands the search engine to find documents that must contain that word. A ***minus sign*** means that you do not want any results that include that word; you want to exclude that word from the results.

**For example**, if you're looking for polar bears, you can tell the search engine that you only want any information about that kind of bear. The query would look like this: **"polar bears" +Alaska**. If you are also interested in what the polar bears in Alaska eat, you can enter the keywords **"polar bear" +Alaska +diet**. If you wanted to find sites about killer whales in the Antarctic, you would want to limit that search by entering +"killer whales" +Antarctic, and you'll probably get about 1,000 sites in your results. But if you exclude sites about arctic killer whales, the number will decrease. Key in **+"killer whales" +Antarctic -arctic** and you'll get about 600 sites.

Another system used by search engines uses regular words, but they are all capitalized:

* **AND** between keywords asks for all the websites and pages that use **both** words. If a website or page has only one of the words, it will not show up in your results.
* **OR** between keywords asks for all the websites and pages that use **either** one or the other word. If a website or page has only one of the words, it will show up in your results.
* **NOT** between words asks for all the websites and pages that do not include a particular word so that you do not have to dig through a lot of results that do not apply to your situation.

Some search engines have a default way of interpreting your search terms without you entering an operator. You may not have to enter the OR operator at all, because they automatically assume you want anything that has either word.

**STOP WORDS**: Stop words are terms that are common parts of speech and don't add anything important to the search, such as pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions. The search engine will ***usually ignore*** them, but they might actually search for these meaningless words. Leave them out; it saves time and gets better results.

Ask your teacher or librarian if there are good sites already bookmarked for your research.

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